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UNCLAS HANOI 001677

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SUBJECT: GVN FRUSTRATED WITH BURMA, BUT. . .

REF: STATE 120720

1. (SBU) Summary: Vietnam shares U.S. concerns about the Constitutional Convention in Burma, and is further worried about the impact of continuing political problems on the Hanoi-hosted ASEM 5 summit. At the same time, Vietnam feels that too much pressure on the Burmese will drive them into China's arms. The GVN has delivered its own "suitable steps" message to the Burmese, however. End summary.

2. (SBU) Poloff met June 10 with Nguyen Dinh Tang, the MFA's Burma expert in the Asia 2 Department, and delivered reftel demarche and a copy of the May 21 public statement. Separately, Charge met with Assistant Foreign Minister and Director General of the Americas Department Nguyen Duc Hung and also expressed US concern about the continued imprisonment of NLD leaders and the current Constitutional Convention process.

3. (SBU) Tang noted that Vietnam and Burma had "long and friendly relations" dating back to 1947, and that both were members of ASEAN. However, he added, Vietnam also supported Burma becoming a "full and strong" member of ASEAN. Tang noted that the first step of Khin Nyunt's 2003 road map was the Constitutional Convention, but the "nonattendance" by the NLD was "not good."

4. (SBU) Tang claimed that "the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, Tin Oo, and other prisoners is part of Myanmar's internal affairs." He added "but we would like the internal affairs of Myanmar to advance peace and progress, and we think the Constitutional Convention should be inclusive." He noted that "as the host of ASEM 5 summit in October, we have consistently encouraged suitable steps for measurable progress to create favorable conditions" for the ASEM meeting. Tang noted that in March 2004 the Prime Minister had sent Foreign Minister Nguyen Dy Nien to deliver a "suitable steps" message. On June 9, Tang delivered the same message to the Burmese Ambassador here, he said. The Burmese Ambassador had responded that the Constitutional Convention was "very important" and would result in "power sharing among the parties and the ethnic groups."

5. (SBU) Tang criticized the US approach as putting "too much pressure" on the Burmese, which would, inevitably, drive them into the arms of the Chinese. ASEAN countries and even India understood this, Tang added. India was especially concerned that Burma "maintain its independence" and remain as a "buffer" between India and China, he noted. India preferred that Burma look to its ASEAN neighbors for support, Tang said, and not China - a goal the U.S. should also have, he commented.

6. (SBU) Comment: Tang returned to the MFA this January from Burma, where he was DCM of the Vietnamese Embassy. He has spent more than nine years in Burma. His frankness regarding the issue likely reflects both the GVN's (and his own) frustration with the Burmese and the possibility of the Burma issue derailing a successful ASEM 5.

PORTER